

# MISSOURI CONSERVATION *Employee* SHOWCASE

## Mary Ann Spilker Soil Conservation Technician, Kingston



*Mary Ann Spilker on a detail to New York state.*

What do you do if you're a farmer with nothing to farm? Mary Ann Spilker has some ideas.

Spilker, a NRCS soil conservation technician at Kingston, moved with her husband Rollan and their children from Nebraska to Missouri in 1981.

"We're farmers," she says. "But that was a tough time to be farmers." It was a tough enough time for farmers that Spilker found herself studying ag-business at the vocational-technical school in Chillicothe in preparation for a job away from the farm. She and Rollan eventually idled their hog, cattle and row-crop operation, and placed the farm into the Conservation Reserve Program.

"I had never heard of NRCS before, but at school I learned about the agency and what it did, and I said 'that's where I want to work,'" she says.

Twenty-one years later, Spilker is still working with landowners in northwestern Missouri. But she's always looking for other ways to contribute to the agency's mission. She has served on the area Civil Rights Committee, been active in Women in Agriculture efforts locally and at the state level, and provided assistance for a host of other meetings, conservation days, soil judging contests, and information and education activities.

In 2005, Spilker joined the Midland Empire American Red Cross, and a year later volunteered to take part in a Red Cross mission to Walton, New York, to help assess flood damages. She volunteered to return to the same area in June 2007 on an NRCS detail, and was able to help with natural resources recovery efforts, especially streambank stabilization.

"It was really nice going to the same area where I was with the American Red Cross because I could see how the towns had pulled back together and were recovering," she says.

Spilker knows about recovery from a personal perspective, too. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004, and she says her recovery has taught her a valuable lesson.

"Life is so short," she says. "Being a breast cancer survivor makes you look at life so much differently. You embrace each day."

Spilker no longer puts off things she wants to do. She admits to a love for "adventurous things," and in the past two years she has gone hot air ballooning, and taken a sailboat cruise. She's also planning another white-water rafting trip out West.

For Spilker, a farmer with nothing to farm, there is so much to do.